

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 12048

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, TH, OVIP (MONDALE, WALTER)
SUBJECT: VICE PRESIDENT VISIT: THAI REFUGEE SITUATION

1. WE WILL BE FORWARDING BY SEPTTEL OUR STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF BOAT CASE SITUATION IN THAILAND. IN SUM, REFUGEE POPULATION IN BOAT CASE CAMPS IN SONGKHLA AND LAEM SING IS AGAIN DRAMATICALLY INCREASING TO OVER 1000 IN EACH. FURTHER, TOTAL BOAT CASE REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THAILAND OO DATE IN APRIL HAVE REACHED 713. APRIL MAY POSSIBLY BE RECORD MONTH FOR BOAT CASE ARRIVALS EXCEEDING OCTOBER 1977 FIGURE OF 858.

2. AS DEPT IS AWARE, PRIMIN KRIANGSAK'S DECISION TO REVERSE THAI POLICY OF REFUSING BOAT CASES WAS MADE OVER STRONG OPPOSITION OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OPERATING LEVELS AS WELL AS OTHER ELEMENTS IN RTG. THIS DECISION TO CONTINUE ACCEPTANCE OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES WAS BASED ESSENTIALLY ON USG APPROACHES AND IN EXPECTATION THAT OUR UPCOMING PROGRAMS WOULD PROVIDE MAJOR RELIEF. DESPITE CONTINUING SERIOUS BUREAUCRATIC OPPOSITION TO KRIANGSAK'S DECISION REGARDING BOAT CASE REFUGEES, TO DATE WE HAVE HAD NO EVIDENCE OF TURNING AWAY OF BOAT CASE REFUGEES FROM THE TWO ESTABLISHED CAMPS SINCE DECEMBER 10. HOWEVER, MOI RESENTMENT OF KRIANGSAK'S DECISION AND OUR DEMARCHES LEADING TO IT REMAIN STRONG AND THERE ARE
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CONTINUING PRESSURES AT RTG WORKING LEVELS TO ADOPT A DE FACTO POLICY OF DISCOURAGING BOAT CASE ARRIVALS. (SENIOR MOI OFFICERS STILL ON OCCASION ANNOUNCE PUBLICLY THAT THAI POLICY IS TO SEND BOAT CASE REFUGEES AWAY, DESPITE PRIMIN KRINGSAK'S DECISION AND ACTUAL PRACTICE.)

3. RTG APPROACH TO LAND CASE REFUGEES HAS ALWAYS BEEN

MORE AMBIGUOUS. ESSENTIALLY, RTG POLICY DISCOURAGING REFUGEES FROM CROSSING THE MEKONG IS IMPLEMENTED BY GOVERNORS AND LOCAL OFFICIALS IN A WIDELY VARYING MANNER. ON AT LEAST THREE OCCASIONS, LATEST BEING MARCH 27 INCIDENT IN CHIANG RAI AREA, LOCAL OFFICIALS HAVE APPARENTLY ENGAGED IN FORCEABLE REPATRIATION OF INDIVIDUAL REFUGEE GROUPS, IN EFFECT TURNING THEM OVER TO LAO AUTHORITIES. MORE GENERAL PATTERN HAS RANGED FROM ACCEPTANCE OF REFUGEES BY NAN GOVERNOR, AND MORE RECENTLY THE NONGKHAI GOVERNOR, THROUGH VERBAL EFFORTS TO DISUADE REFUGEES FROM ENTERING THAILAND TO COERCIVE MEASURES FORCING REFUGEES ACROSS MEKONG, BUT FAILLING SHORT OF ACTUALLY TURNING THEM OVER TO LAO OFFICIALS. OVERALL RESULT OF THIS POLICY HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN NUMBER OF LAND REFUGEES ENTERING THAILAND. HOWEVER MONTHLY STATISTICS SHOW THAT FAIR NUMBERS ARE IN FACT SLIPPING ACROSS BORDER. IN PARTICULAR CASE OF HMONG FLEEING FROM VIETNAMESE/LAO TROOPS IN PHU BIA AREA AND CROSSING INTO NONGKHAI, RTG IS ALLOWING THEIR ENTRY, DESPITE INITIAL NEGATIVE ATTITUDES OF SOME LOCAL OFFICIALS.

4. DESPITE TOUGH STANCE ON REFUGEE ARRIVALS, WE ARE ALSO RECEIVING INDICATION THAT THAI OFFICIALDOM IS STUDYING SERIOUSLY QUESTION OF LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF AT LEAST SOME LAND REFUGEES ALREADY IN THAILAND.
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UNHCR ONCE MORE APRIL 25 URGED THIS, WITH LURE OF SIGNIFICANT UNHCR PROGRAM MLNIES AVAILABLE THIS YEAR. WE EXPECT THAT IN ONE OR ANOTHER, PRIMIN MAY WISH TO SURFACE AT LEAST GENERAL OUTLINE OF CURRENT THAI THINKING ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT IN HIS DISCUSSION WITH

VICE PRESIDENT. AMBASSADOR IS SCHEDULED TO MEET PRIMIN ON APRIL 28 AND WE MAY HAVE BETTER READING AT THAT TIME.

5. DURING VISIT KRIANGSAK AND OTHERS MAY PRESS HARD ON REFUGEE QUESTION AN EXPECT VICE PRESIDENT TO CONFIRM OUR INTENTIONS REGARDING MAJOR ON-GOING REFUGEE ACCEPTANCE PROGRAM AS WELL AS OUR READINESS TO ASSIST RTG IN BEARING REFUGEE BURDEN IN THAILAND. THEY HOPE FOR EXPOSITION OF CONCRETE USG PROJECTED ACITIONS TO TAKE SIZEABLE NUMBER OF REFUGEES FROM BOTH BOAT CASE AND LAND CAMPS. RTG OBVIOUSLY EXPECT THAT OUR RECENTLY ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO ADMIT 25,000 INDO-CHINESE REFUGEES WILL PERMIT A SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN CURRENT REFUGEE POPULATION IN THAILAND. THEY MAY BE ALSO UNREALISTICALLY HOPEFUL THAT VIRTUALLY ALL OF

THAT NUMBER WILL BE FROM THAILAND.

6. IN THIS SITUATION BELIEVE IT HIGHLY IMPORTANT THAT AT A MINIMUM ATTORNEY GENERAL'S DECISION REGARDING NEW PAROLE AUTHORITY BE MADE IN ADVANCE OF VICE PRESIDENT'S ARRIVAL AND THAT WE BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN CLEARLY WHAT IMPACT OF NEW PROGRAM FOR THAILAND WILL BE OVER NEXT YEAR. IF ATTORNEY GENERAL'S DECISION IS NOT MADE BEFORE VISIT, THAI MAY WELL GET IMPRESSION OF CONTINUING DELAY AND DRIFT ON OUR PART WHILE THEIR REFUGEE POPULATION AGAIN BEGINS TO MOUNT. THIS COULD HAVE AN EXTREMELY NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THAI POLICY, PARTICULARLY WHEN RTG SENIOR LEVELS BECOME AWARE OF LATEST INCREASE IN BOAT CASE REFUGEE ARRIVALS. WE FEAR WTHAT
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WE ARE HEADING FOR MAJOR DIFFUCULTIES IN COMING MONTHS IN ANY EVENT. HOWEVER HOPEFULLY COMBINATION OF ATTORNEY GENERAL'S DECISION AND VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT WOULD STRENGTHEN KRIANGSAK'S DETERMINATION TO KEEP TO HIS MORE HUMANITARIAN APPROACH TO REFUGEE ACCEPTANCE.

7. ACTION RECOMMENDED: EARLY DECISION BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ON NEW INDOCHINESE PAROLE PROGRAM TO BE ANNOUNCED BEFORE FICE PRESIDENT'S ARRIVAL IN BANGKO.
WHITEHOUSE

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